WLE Storyworld

Victorian Tales

Selected by Ruth Clarke

Series Editor Geoffrey Summerfield

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Ward Lock Educational Storyworld
General Editor: Geoffrey Summerfield

Victorian Tales

Fairy Bread

Come up here, O dusty feet!
Here is fairy bread to eat.
Here in my retiring room,
  Children, you may dine
On the golden smell of broom
  And the shade of pine;
And when you have eaten well,
Fairy stories hear and tell.

Victorian Tales

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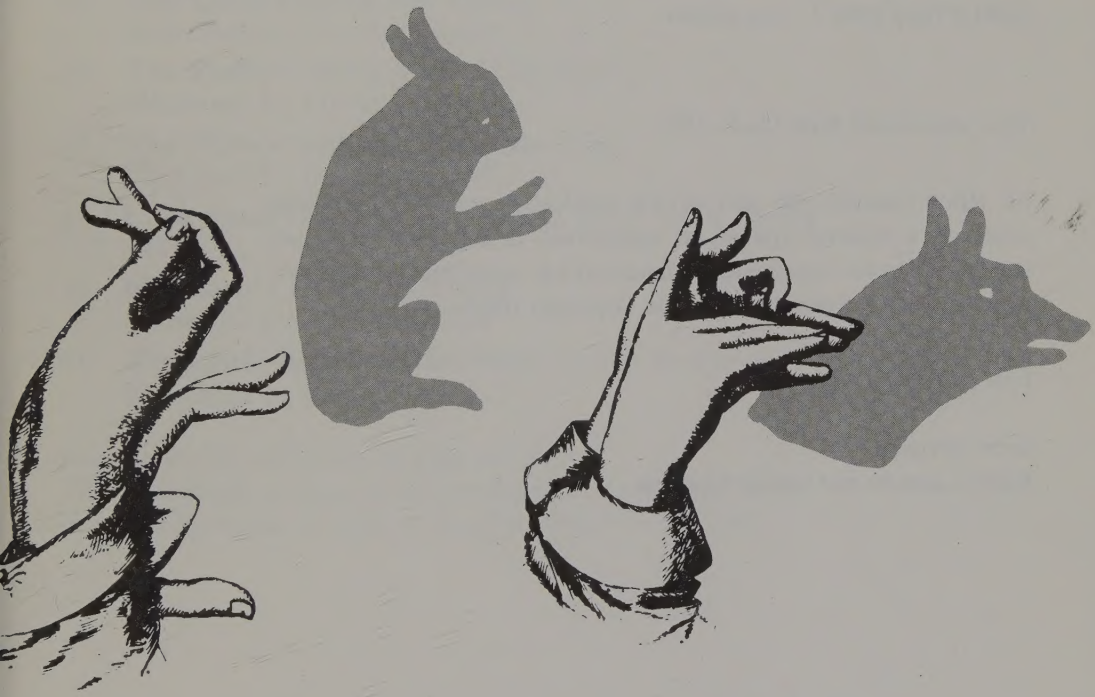

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VICTORIAN TALES

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The Rain Maiden

Once upon a time there was a shepherd and his wife, who lived in a very lonely cottage far from town or village, near some mountains. It was a wild neighbourhood, and the wind blew across the mountains fiercely, and the rain often fell so heavily that it seemed as if the cottage would be washed away. One evening when the shepherd was out, there came on a great storm of rain which beat against the doors and the windows violently. As the shepherd's wife sat listening to it by the fire, it seemed to her as if the storm sounded louder than she had ever heard it before, and the raindrops sounded like a hand knocking to gain admittance. It went on for a little time, till the shepherd's wife could bear to listen to it no longer, and she rose and went to the door. As she opened it, a gust of rain was blown in her face, and then she saw that in the doorway stood a woman who had been knocking. She was a tall woman wrapped in a grey cloak with long hair falling down her back.

'Thank you,' she said. And though her voice was very low, the shepherd's wife could hear it plainly through all the storm. 'Thank you for opening the door to me. Many would have let me stand outside. Now may I come into your cottage and rest?'

'How wet you must be!' cried the shepherd's wife. 'Come in and rest, and let me give you food. Have you come from far?'

'No, I come from quite near,' said the woman,

and she came into the cottage as she spoke, and sat down in a chair near the door. 'And I want no food, only a glass of water. I must go directly, but I have not far to go, and I shall be no wetter than I am now.'

The shepherd's wife stared in surprise, for she saw that apparently the woman's clothes were not wet at all. And what was stranger still, though she had thought she was only clad in a dull grey cloak, now

she saw that the woman was covered with jewellery – clear stones, like diamonds with many flashing colours; and she also saw that all her clothes were of the finest. She gave her a glass of water, and begged that she might give her other food as well, but the woman shook her head, and said no, water was all she needed. When she had drunk the water she gave back the glass to the shepherd's wife, and said, 'And so this is your home. Have you all that you want in life? Are you happy?'

'Ay, we are happy enough,' said the shepherd's wife, 'save indeed for one thing. Ten years ago my little baby girl died, and I have no other children. I long for one sorely.'

'And if you had a little child,' said the woman, 'you think you would really love it better than anything in the world. Many women say that, but few do it. Before long a little girl will be born to you, and as long as you love her better than anything in the world she will remain with you, but when you love anything else better than your little daughter and her happiness, she will go from you; so remember my words. Goodbye.' And the woman walked to the door and out into the rain.

A year passed away, and the shepherd's wife had a tiny daughter. The evening she was born the wind howled and the rain fell as fiercely as on the night when the grey woman had come into the shepherd's cottage. The shepherd and his wife both loved their little daughter very dearly, as well they might, as no fairer child was ever seen. But as she grew older, some things about her frightened her mother, and

she had some ways of which she could not cure her. She would never go near a fire, however cold she was, neither did she love the sunshine, but always ran from it and crept into the shade; but when she heard the rain pattering against the window-panes she would cry, 'Listen, Mother, listen to my brothers and sisters dancing,' and then she would begin to dance too in the cottage; or, if she possibly could, she would run out onto the moor and dance, with the rain falling upon her, yet she never seemed to get very wet, nor did she catch cold. A river ran near the cottage, and she would go and sit for hours dabbling her feet in the water, and singing songs to herself. Still, in all other ways she was a good, affectionate girl, and did all that her mother told her, and seemed to love both her parents tenderly, and

the shepherd's wife would say to herself, 'My only trouble is that when she is grown up, she will want to marry, and leave me, and I shall have to do without her.'

Time passed, and the old shepherd died, but his wife and daughter still lived on in the little cottage, and the daughter grew to be a most beautiful young maiden. Her eyes were clear light-blue, like the colour of the far-off sea, but it was difficult to say what was the colour of her hair, save that it was very fair, and hung in heavy masses over her brow and shoulders.

A little way from the cottage on the mountain side stood an old castle, where formerly the kings of the land used to come and stay, but which now had not been used for very many years. One day, however, the shepherd's wife saw great preparations were being made there, and she knew that the King and his son were coming to stay again. Soon after they had arrived, the shepherd's daughter went down to the river and sat on the bank, dipping her feet in the ripples. Presently there came up a boat, and a grand young man dressed all in velvet and gold leaned over the side to fish.

'Who are you, and what are you doing here?' cried the shepherd's daughter.

'I am the King's son,' said he. 'Who are you, and where do you come from, for I have never seen such a beautiful maiden in my life?' and he looked at her and could scarce speak, so beautiful did she seem to him.

'It is cruel to take the fishes out of the water,'

cried the shepherd's daughter, 'leave them alone, and come and dance on the bank with me,' and she went under the shade of a large tree, and began to dance, and the King's son watched her.

Day after day he came down to the river to fish, and day after day he left the line and tackle to sit and watch the shepherd's daughter, and each time found her more enchanting. Once he tried to kiss her hand, but she sprang from him and left him sitting in his boat alone. At last a day came when the Prince said to his father, 'My Father, you want me to wed so that I may have an heir to the throne, but there is only one woman that can ever be my wife, and that is the daughter of the poor woman who lives in the little cottage out yonder.'

At first the old King was very angry, but he loved his son, and knew that nothing would shake him from his word, so he told him that if he would bring home his bride, he too would rejoice and love her as his daughter. Then the young Prince rode down to the cottage, and went in and told the shepherd's wife how he had seen her daughter, and loved her and wished to make her his wife, so that she would be Queen of the country.

The shepherd's wife went nearly wild with joy. 'To think that my daughter should be the Queen,' she said to herself, and when her daughter came into the cottage she did not know how to contain herself, but folded her in her arms and kissed her, crying and declaring that never was woman so blessed.

'Why, what has happened, Mother? What has pleased you so?' said her daughter.

'It is the King's son, my girl, the King's own son, and he has just been here, and he loves you because you are so beautiful, and he will marry you and

make you Queen of all the land. Was there ever such luck for a poor woman?'

But the daughter only said, 'But I don't want to marry the King's son, Mother, or anyone. I will never be the wife of any man; I will stay with you and nurse you when you are old and sick, for I can live in no house but this cottage, and have no friend but my Mother.'

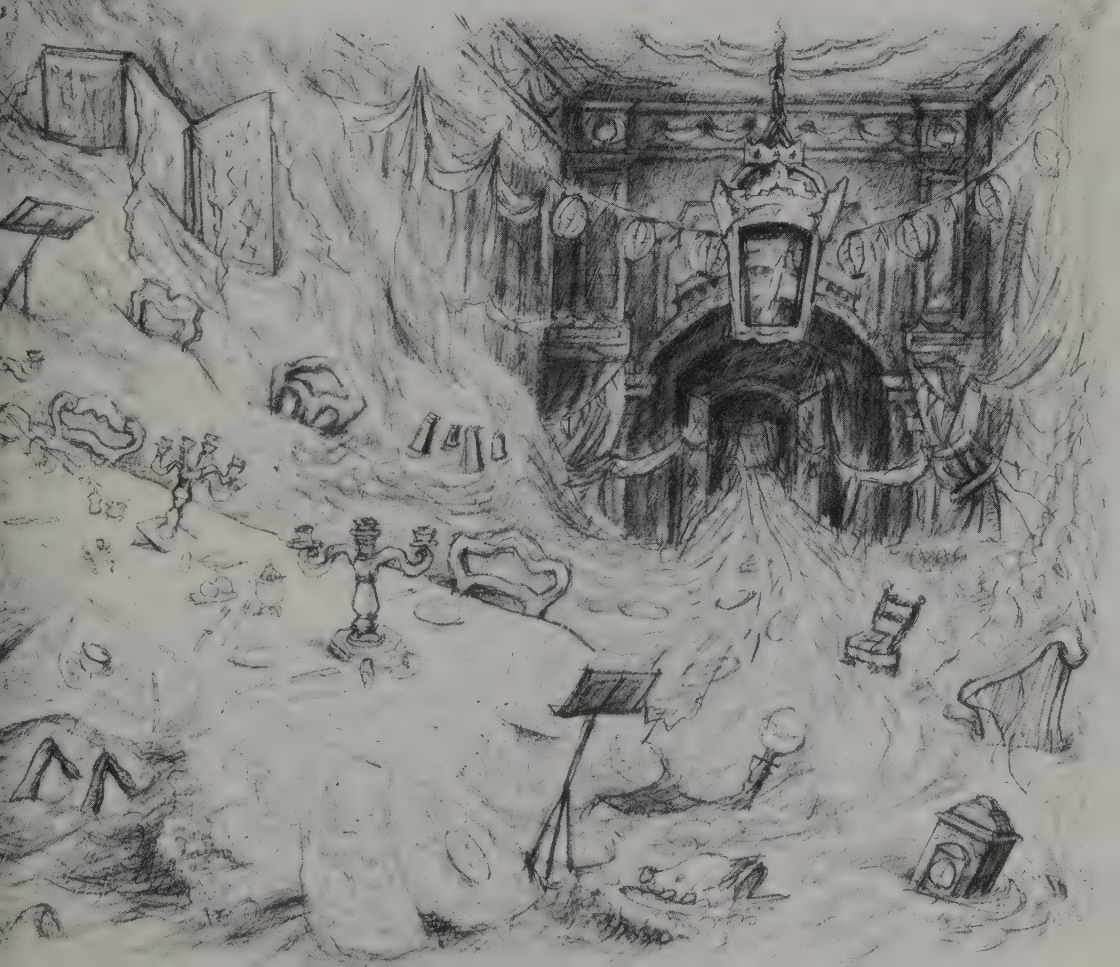
On hearing this the shepherd's wife became very angry, and told her daughter that she must be mad. But still the daughter shook her head, and said quite quietly, 'I will never be the wife of the King's son.' The shepherd's wife did not dare tell the King's son what her daughter had said, but told him that he had better speak to her himself if he wished to make her his wife. Then when he was again sitting in the boat on the river, and the maiden on the bank, the King's son told her how much he loved her. But the shepherd's daughter only shook her head and said, 'I will never live at the palace, and I will never be a queen.'

The old King had ordered great preparations to be made for the wedding, which was to take place immediately, and all sorts of fine clothes were ordered for the shepherd's daughter. But for the few days just before the wedding, the rain fell as it had never been known to have fallen; it beat through the roofs of the cottages, and the river swelled and overflowed its banks. Everyone was frightened, save indeed the shepherd's daughter, who went out into the wet and danced letting the torrents fall upon her head and shoulders.

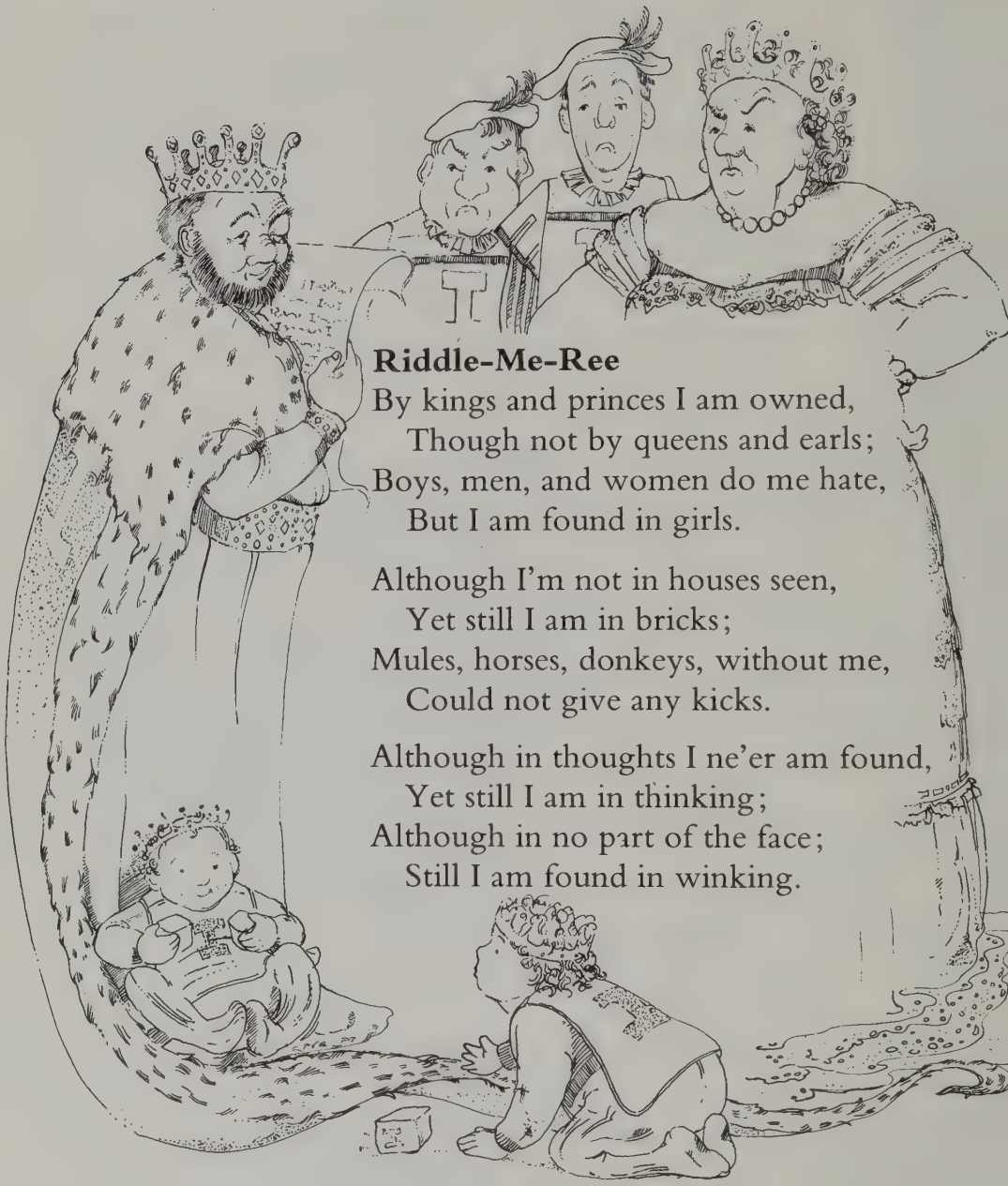
All night long before the wedding the rain fell in torrents, and when next day the shepherd's daughter was dressed in all her finery, it was through pools on the ground that she had to step into the grand carriage which the King had sent to fetch her, and while the marriage-service was being read, the priest's voice could scarcely be heard for the pattering of the drops upon the roof, and when they went into the castle to the banquet, the water burst through the doors opened to receive them, so that the King and the wedding guests could hardly keep dry. It was a grand feast, and the King's son sat at one end of the table, and his young wife was beside him dressed in white and gold. All the courtiers and all the fine guests declared that surely the world had never contained such a beautiful young woman as their future Queen. But just when the goblets were filled with wine, to drink the health of the bride and bridegroom, there came a cry, 'The floods! the floods!' and the servants ran into the hall, crying out that the waters were pouring in, and in one moment the rooms were filled with water, and no one thought of anything but to save themselves. When the storm had subsided, and the waters gone down, they looked around for the Prince's wife but she was nowhere to be found. Everyone said that she had been swept away by the torrents, and drowned. But the shepherd's wife wept as she remembered the words of the woman who came to her on the night of the storm: 'When you love anything else on earth better than your daughter and her happiness, she

will go from you'; for she knew that her greed and pride had made those words come true.

The King's son mourned his wife, and for long would not be comforted; but when many years had passed, he married a beautiful Princess, and with her lived very happily. It was only when the rain fell in torrents and beat against the window-panes that it would seem to him as if he heard the sound of dancing feet, and a voice that called out, 'Come and dance with me, come and dance with me and my brothers and sisters, oh, King's son, and feel our drops upon your face.'



Word Puzzles



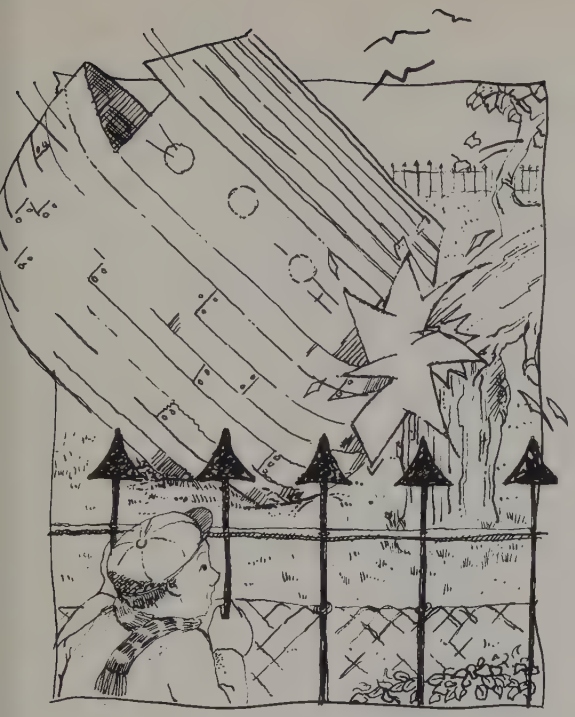
Riddle-Me-Ree

By kings and princes I am owned,
  Though not by queens and earls;
Boys, men, and women do me hate,
  But I am found in girls.

Although I'm not in houses seen,
  Yet still I am in bricks;
Mules, horses, donkeys, without me,
  Could not give any kicks.

Although in thoughts I ne'er am found,
  Yet still I am in thinking;
Although in no part of the face;
  Still I am found in winking.

Answers on page 49



Decapitation

Whole I am fire;
behead me,
I am an enclosure;
behead me again,
and I once saved a family.

Decapitation

Whole I am transparent;
behead me, I am a girl;
behead me again
and I am an animal.

The Little Darner

In days gone by there lived a poor widow who had brought up her only child so well that the little lass was more helpful and handy than many a grown-up person.

When other women's children were tearing and dirtying their clothes, clamouring at their mothers' skirts for this and that, losing and breaking and spoiling things, and getting into mischief of all kinds, the widow's little girl, with her tiny thimble on her finger, could patch quite neatly. She was to be trusted to put anything in its proper place, and when meals were over she would stand on a little stool at the table washing up the dishes. Moreover, she could darn stockings so well that the darn looked like a part of the stocking. The lazy mothers who spoiled and scolded their children by turns, and had never taught them to be tidy and obedient, used often to quote the widow's little girl to their troublesome brats, and say, 'Why don't you help your mother as the widow's daughter helps her?'

Thus it came about that the helpless, useless, untidy little girls hated the very name of the widow's daughter because they were always being told of her usefulness and neatness.

Now the widow's child often earned a few pence by herding sheep or pigs for the farmers, or by darning stockings for their wives, and, as she could be trusted, people were very glad to employ her. One day she was keeping watch over five little pigs

in a field, and, not to waste time, was darning a pair of stockings as well, when some of the little girls who had a spite against her resolved to play her a trick.

Near the field where the little maid and the pigs were there was a wood, into which all children were strictly forbidden to go. For in the depths of the wood there lived a terrible Ogre and Ogress, who kidnapped all children who strayed near their dwelling. Every morning the Ogre threw a big black bag over his shoulder, and stalked through the forest, making the ground shake as he walked. If he found any truant children he popped them into his bag, and when he got home his wife cooked them for supper.

The trick played upon the widow's daughter was this. Five little girls came up to the field where she was herding the five little pigs. They each chased a pig and drove it into the Ogre's wood. In vain the little maid called to her flock; the pigs ran in a frightened troop into the wood, and she ran after them. When the five little girls saw that the widow's daughter had rounded up the pigs again, they ran in to chase them away once more, and so they were all in the wood together, when the Ogre came stalking through the trees. The ground shook; the six little girls and the five little pigs tumbled over and the Ogre picked them up, and put them one after another into his bag.

When they were jolting about with the pigs in the poke as the Ogre strode homewards, the five spiteful children were as sorry as you please and, as the pigs

were always fighting and struggling to get to the top, they did not escape without some scratches. And their screams, and the squealing of the little pigs made such a noise that the Ogre's wife heard it a mile and a half away in the depths of the wood; and she lighted a fire under the copper, and filled it with water, ready to cook whatever her husband brought home.

As for the widow's little daughter, she pulled her needle-book from her pocket, and every now and then she pushed a needle through the sack, that it might fall on the ground, and serve as a guide if she should ever have the chance of finding her way home again.

When the Ogre arrived, he emptied the sack, and sent the six little girls and the five little pigs all sprawling onto the floor, saying:

'These will last us some time. Cook the fattest, and put the rest in the cellar. And whilst you get dinner ready, I will take another stroll with the bag. Luck seldom comes singly.'

When he had gone, the Ogress looked over the children, and picked out the widow's daughter, saying:

'You look the most good-humoured. And the best-tempered always make the best eating.'

So she set her down on a stool by the fire till the water should boil, and locked the others up in the cellar.

'Tears won't put the fire out,' thought the little maid. So instead of crying she pulled out the old stocking, and went on with her darning. When the

Ogress came back from the cellar she went up to her and looked at her work.

'How you darn!' she cried. 'Now that's the sort of thing I hate. And the Ogre does wear such big holes in his stockings, and his feet are so large that though my hand is not a small one, I cannot fill out the heel with my fist, and then who's to darn it neatly I should like to know?'

'If I had a basin big enough to fill out the heel, I think I could do it,' said the little maid.

The Ogress scratched her big ear thoughtfully for a minute, and then she said; 'To lose a chance is to cheat oneself. Why shouldn't this one darn while the others boil? Yes, I think you shall try. Six days ought to serve for mending all the stockings, though the Ogre hasn't a whole pair left, and angry enough he'll be. And when household matters are not to his mind he puts that big sack over my head, and ties it round my neck. And if you had ever done housework with your head in a poke, you'd know what it is! So you shall darn the stockings, and if you do them well, I'll cook one of the others first instead of you.'

Saying which, the Ogress fetched one of the Ogre's stockings, and the widow's child put a big basin into the heel to stretch it, and began to darn. The Ogress watched her till she had put all the threads one way, and when she began to run the cross threads, interlacing them with the utmost exactness, the old creature was delighted, and went to fetch another child to be cooked instead of the widow's.

When the other little girl came up, she cried and screamed so that the room rang with her lamentations, and the widow's child laid down her needle and ceased working.

'Why don't you go on darning?' asked the Ogress.

'Alas! dear mother,' said she, 'the little sister's cries make my heart beat so that I cannot darn evenly.'

'Then she must go back to the cellar for a bit,' said the Ogress. 'And meanwhile I'll sharpen the knife.'

So after she had taken back the crying child, and had watched the little girl, who now darned away as skilfully as ever, the Ogress took down a huge knife from the wall, and began to sharpen it on a grindstone in a corner of the kitchen. As she sharpened the knife, she glanced from time to time at the little maid, and soon perceived that she had once more ceased working.

'Why don't you go on darning?' asked the Ogress.

'Alas! dear mother,' said the child, 'when I hear you sharpening that terrible knife my hands tremble so that I cannot thread my needle.'

'Well, it will do now,' growled the Ogress, feeling the edge of the blade with her horny finger; and, having seen the darning-needle once more at work, she went to fetch up one of the children. As she went, she hummed what cookmaids sing: 'Dilly, dilly duckling, come and be killed!' But it sounded like the wheezing and groaning of a heavy old door upon its rusty hinges.

When she came in, with the child in one hand, and the huge knife in the other, she went up to the little darner to look at her work. The heel of the Ogre's stocking was exquisitely mended, all but seven threads; but the little maid sat idle with her hands before her.

'Why don't you go on darning?' asked the Ogress.

'Alas! dear mother,' was the reply, 'when I think of my little playmate about to die, the tears blind my eyes, so that I cannot see what stitches I take. Wherefore I beg of you, dear mother, to cook one of the little pigs instead, that I may be able to go on with my work, and that a pair of stockings may be ready tomorrow morning when the Ogre will ask for them; so my playmate's life will be spared, and your head will not be put into a poke.'

At first the Ogress would not hear of such a thing, but at last she consented, and made a stew of one of the little pigs instead of cooking the little girl.

'But supposing the Ogre goes to count the children,' said she; 'he will find one too many.'

'Then let her go, dear mother,' said the widow's daughter, 'she will find her way home, and you will never be blamed.'

'But she must stir the stew with her forefinger first,' said the Ogress, 'that it may have a human flavour.'

So the little girl had to stir the hot stew with her finger, which scalded it badly; and then she was set at liberty, and ran home as hard as she could; and as the little maid's needles sparkled here and there on the path, she had no difficulty in finding her way.

The Ogre was quite contented with his dinner, and the Ogress got great praise for the way in which she had darned his stockings. Thus it went on for four days more. As the widow's little girl wouldn't work if her companions were killed, the Ogress cooked the pigs one after another, and the children were all sent away with burnt forefingers.

When the fifth had been dismissed, and all the pigs were eaten, the Ogress said:

'Tomorrow you will have to be stewed, and now I wish I had kept one of the others that I might have saved you altogether to work for me. However, there is one comfort, the stockings are finished.'

But meanwhile the other children had got safely home, and had told their tale. And all the men of the place set off at once to attack the Ogre, and release the widow's child. Guided by the needles, they arrived just as the Ogress was sharpening the big knife for the last time.

So they killed the Ogre and his wife, and took the industrious little maid back to her mother.

The other little girls were now very repentant, and when their fingers were well, they all learned to darn stockings at once.

And as for the widow's little girl – well, it was often observed that her eyes would twinkle as she sat sewing. Perhaps she was saying to herself, 'A pocket-book of needles is useful, but I'm glad that I have sharp wits as well!'

The Pedlar's Pack

A pedlar was toiling along a dusty road carrying his pack on his back, when he saw a donkey grazing by the wayside.

'Good-day, friend,' said he. 'If you have nothing to do, perhaps you would not mind carrying my load for me for a little.'

'If I do so, what will you give me?' said the donkey.

'I will give you two pieces of gold,' said the pedlar, but he did not speak the truth, for he knew he had no gold to give.

'Agreed,' said the donkey. So they journeyed on together in a very friendly manner, the donkey carrying the pedlar's pack, and the pedlar walking by his side. After a time they met a raven, who was looking for worms in the roadside, and the donkey called out to him:

'Good-morrow, black friend. If you are going our way, you would do well to sit upon my back and drive away the flies, which worry me sadly.'

'And what will you pay me to do this?' asked the raven.

'Money is no object to me,' said the donkey, 'so I will give you three pieces of gold.' And he too knew he was making a false promise, for he had no gold at all to give.

'Agreed,' said the raven. So they went on in high good humour, the donkey carrying the pedlar's wares, and the raven sitting on the donkey's back driving away the flies.

After a time they met a hedge-sparrow, and the raven called out to it:

'Good-day, little cousin. Do you want to earn a little money? If so, bring me some worms from the bank as we go along, for I had no breakfast, and am very hungry.'

'What will you give me for it?' asked the hedge-sparrow.

'Let us say four pieces of gold,' said the raven grandly; 'for I have saved more during my long life than I know how to spend.' But he knew this was not true, for he had not saved any gold at all.

'Very well,' said the hedge-sparrow, and so on they went, the donkey carrying the pedlar's pack, and the raven keeping the flies away from the donkey, and the hedge-sparrow bringing worms to the raven.

Presently they saw in the distance a good-sized town, and the pedlar took out from his pack some

shawls and scarfs and hung them over the donkey's back that the passers-by might see, and buy if they were so disposed. On the top of the other goods lay a small scarlet blanket, and when he saw it the hedge-sparrow said to the pedlar:

'What will you take for that little blanket? It seems to be a good one. Name your price and you shall have it, whatever it is, for I am badly in want of a blanket just now'; but as the hedge-sparrow had not a penny in the world, he knew he could not pay for it.

'The price of the blanket is five pieces of gold,' said the pedlar.

'That seems to me to be very dear,' said the hedge-sparrow. 'I don't mind giving you four pieces of gold for it, but five is too much.'

'Agreed,' said the pedlar, and he chuckled to himself and thought, 'Now I shall be able to pay the donkey, otherwise I might have had some trouble in getting rid of him.'

The hedge-sparrow flew to the raven's side and whispered in his ear, 'Please pay me the four pieces of gold you owe me, for we are coming to a town, and I must be turning back.'

'Four pieces of gold is really too much for bringing a few worms,' said the raven. 'It is absurd to expect such payment, but I will give you three, and you shall have them almost immediately,' and he bent down over the donkey's ear and whispered:

'My friend, it is time you paid me the three pieces of gold which you promised, for the pedlar will stop at this town, and you will not have to go further with him.'

'On thinking it over,' said the donkey, 'I have come to the conclusion that three pieces of gold is really a great deal too much to give for having a few flies driven away. You must have known that I was only joking when I said it, but I will let you have two, though I consider that it is much more than the job was worth'; and the donkey turned again to the pedlar, saying, 'Now, good sir, your two pieces of gold, if you please.'

'In a moment,' said the pedlar, and turning to the hedge-sparrow, said, 'I really must have the money for the blanket at once.'

'So you shall,' answered the hedge-sparrow, and cried angrily to the raven, 'I want my money now, and cannot wait.'

'In an instant,' answered the raven, and again whispered to the donkey, 'Why can't you pay me honestly? I should be ashamed of trying to slip out of my debts in such a way.'

'I won't keep you waiting a second,' said the donkey, and he turned once more to the pedlar and cried, 'Come, give me my money. For shame! A man like you trying to cheat a poor beast like me.'

Then the pedlar said to the hedge-sparrow, 'Pay me for my blanket, or I'll wring your neck.'

And the hedge-sparrow cried to the raven, 'Give me my money or I'll peck out your eyes.'

And the raven croaked to the donkey, 'If you don't pay me, I'll bite off your tail.'

And the donkey again cried to the pedlar, 'You dishonest wretch, pay me my money or I'll kick you soundly.'

And they made such an uproar outside the walls of the town, that the beadle came out to see what it was all about. Each turned to him and began to complain of the other loudly.

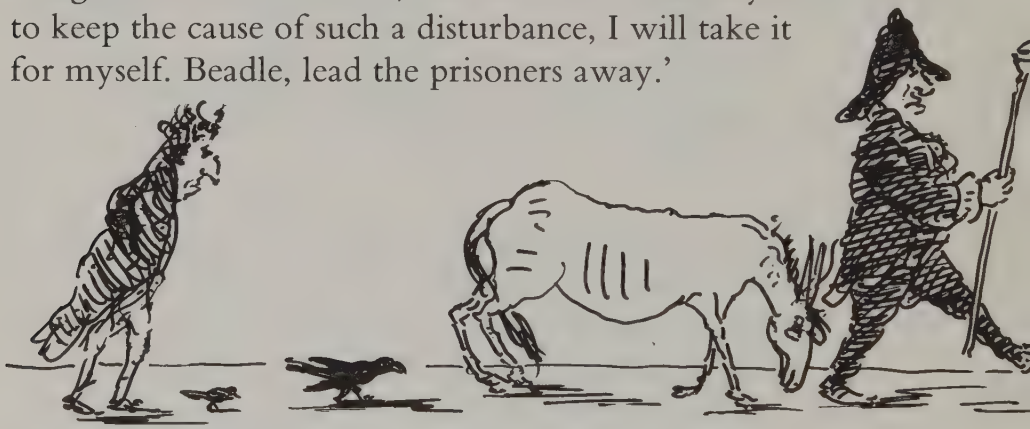
'You are a set of rogues and vagabonds,' said the beadle, 'and you shall all come before the mayor, and he'll settle your quarrels pretty quickly, and treat you as you deserve.'

At this they all begged to be allowed to go away, each one saying he did not care about being paid at all. But the beadle would not listen to them, and led them straight away to the market-place, where the mayor sat judging the people.

'Now, whom have we here?' cried he. 'A pedlar, a donkey, a raven, and a hedge-sparrow. A set of worthless vagabonds, I'll be bound! Let us hear what they have to say for themselves.'

On this the pedlar began to complain of the hedge-sparrow, and the hedge-sparrow of the raven, and the raven of the donkey, and the donkey of the pedlar.

The mayor did not heed them much, but he eyed the pedlar's pack, and at length interrupted them, and said, 'I am convinced that you are a set of good-for-nothing fellows, and one is quite as bad as the other, so I order that the pedlar be locked up in the prison, that the donkey be thrashed, and that the raven and the hedge-sparrow both have their tail-feathers pulled out, and then be turned out of the town. As for the blanket, it seems to me to be the only good thing in the whole matter, and as I cannot allow you to keep the cause of such a disturbance, I will take it for myself. Beadle, lead the prisoners away.'



So the beadle did as he was told, and the pedlar was locked up for many days in the prison.

'It is very sad to think to what straits an honest man may be brought,' he sighed to himself as he sat lamenting his hard fate. 'In future this will be a warning to me to keep clear of hedge-sparrows. If the hedge-sparrow had paid me as he ought, I should not be here now.'

Meantime the donkey was being thrashed, and after each blow he cried:

'Alas! alas! See what comes to an innocent quadruped for having to do with human beings. Had the pedlar given me the money he owed, I should not now be beaten thus. In future I will never make a bargain with men.'

The raven and the hedge-sparrow hopped out of the town by different roads, and both were very sad, for they had lost all their tail-feathers, which the beadle had pulled out.

'Alas!' croaked the raven, 'my fate is indeed a hard one. But it serves me right for trusting a donkey who goes on his feet and cannot fly. It is truly a warning to me never again to trust anything without a beak.'

The hedge-sparrow was quite crestfallen, and could scarcely keep from tears. 'It all comes of my being so taken in by that raven,' he sighed. 'But I should have known that these large birds are never honest. In future I will be wise, and never make a bargain with anything bigger or stronger than myself.'

WONDERS
OF
A TOY-SHOP.

"Pray, what would you like?" said a Toyman,
one day,
Addressing a group of young folks;
"I have toys in abundance, and very cheap, too,
Though not quite so cheap as my jokes.

"A full set of bricks is enclosed in this box,
(With the mortar we well may dispense,)
But with these you may build a magnificent house,
Without e'en a farthing's expense:

"With these you may raise up a Royal Exchange,
In less than five minutes;—and then
Knock it down, and build up a new Parliament House,
In another five minutes,—or ten.

The Prince with the Nose

There was once a King who was passionately in love with a beautiful Princess, but she could not be married because a magician had enchanted her. The King went to a good fairy to enquire what he should do. Said the fairy, after receiving him graciously: 'Sir, I will tell you a secret. The Princess has a great cat whom she loves so well that she cares for nothing and nobody else; but she will be obliged to marry any person who is nimble enough to walk upon the cat's tail.'

'That will not be very difficult,' thought the King to himself, and departed, resolving to trample the cat's tail to pieces rather than not succeed in walking upon it. He went immediately to the palace of his fair mistress and the cat; the animal came in front of him, arching its back in anger as it was wont to do. The King lifted up his foot, thinking nothing would be so easy as to tread on the tail, but he found himself mistaken. Minon – that was the creature's name – twisted itself round so sharply that the King only hurt his own foot by stamping on the floor. For eight days he pursued the cat everywhere: up and down the palace he was after it from morning till night, but with no better success; the tail seemed made of quicksilver, so very lively was it. At last the King had the good fortune to catch Minon sleeping, when tramp, tramp! he trod on the tail with all his force.

Minon woke up, mewed horribly, and then

changed from a cat into a large, fierce-looking man, who regarded the King with flashing eyes.

'You must marry the Princess,' he cried, 'because you have broken the enchantment in which I held her; but I will be revenged on you. You shall have a son with a nose as long as – that' – he made in the air a curve of half a foot – 'yet he shall believe it is just like all other noses, and shall be always unfortunate till he has found out it is not. And if you ever tell anybody of this threat of mine, you shall die on the spot.' So saying, the magician disappeared.

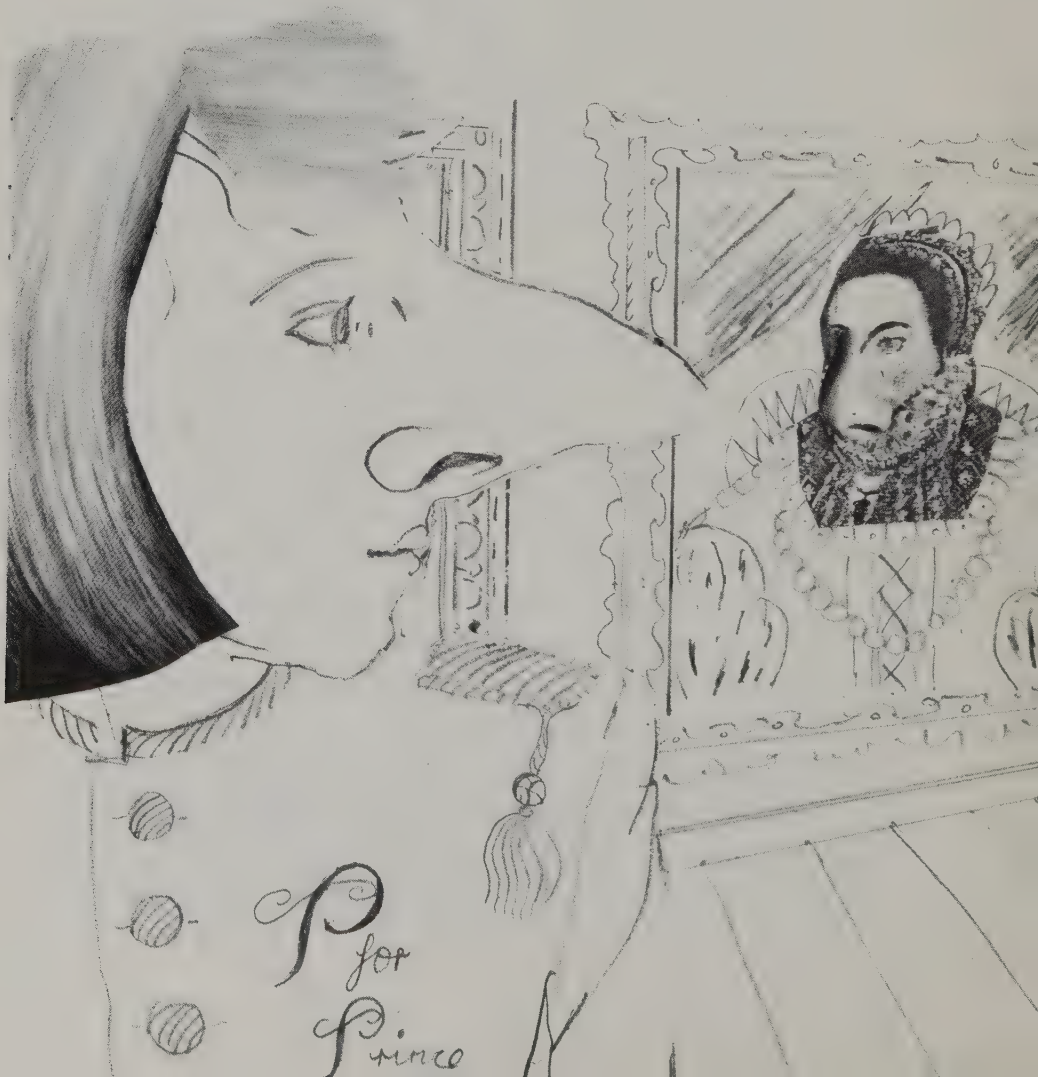
The King, who was at first much terrified, soon began to laugh at this adventure. 'My son might have a worse misfortune than too long a nose,' thought he. 'At least it will hinder him neither in seeing nor hearing. I will go and find the Princess, and marry her at once.'

He did so, but he only lived a few months after, and died before his little son was born, so that nobody knew anything about the secret of the nose.

The little Prince was so much wished for, that when he came into the world they agreed to call him Prince Wish. He had beautiful blue eyes, and a sweet little mouth, but his nose was so big that it covered half his face. The Queen, his mother, was inconsolable, but her ladies tried to satisfy her by telling her that the nose was not nearly so large as it seemed, that it would grow smaller as the Prince grew bigger, and that if it did not a large nose was indispensable to a hero. All great soldiers, they said, had great noses, as everybody knew. The Queen was so very fond of her son that she listened eagerly to

all this comfort. Shortly she grew so used to the Prince's nose that it did not seem to her any larger than ordinary noses of the court; where, in process of time, everybody with a long nose was very much admired, and the unfortunate people who had only snubs were taken very little notice of.

Great care was observed in the education of the Prince; and as soon as he could speak they told him all sorts of amusing tales, in which all the bad people

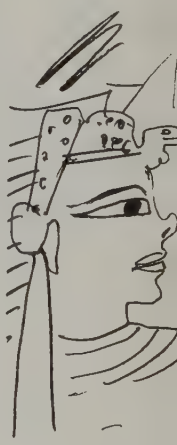


had short noses, and all the good people long noses. No person was allowed to come near him who had not a nose of more than ordinary length; nay, to such extent did the courtiers carry their fancy, that the noses of all the little babies were ordered to be pulled out as far as possible several times a day, in order to make them grow. But grow as they would, they never could grow as long as that of Prince Wish. When he was old enough his tutor taught him history; and whenever any great king or lovely princess was referred to, the tutor always took care to mention that he or she had a long nose. All the royal apartments were filled with pictures and portraits having this peculiarity, so that at last

Prince Wish began to regard the length of his nose as his greatest perfection, and would not have had it an inch less even to save his crown.

When he was twenty years old his mother and his people wished him to marry. They procured for him the likenesses of many princesses, but the one he preferred was Princess Darling, daughter of a powerful monarch and heiress to several kingdoms. Alas! with all her beauty, this princess had one great misfortune, a little turned-up nose, which, everyone else said, made her only the more bewitching. But here, in the kingdom of Prince Wish, the courtiers were thrown by it into the utmost perplexity. They were in the habit of laughing at all small noses; but how dared they make fun of the nose of Princess Darling? Two unfortunate gentlemen, whom Prince Wish had overheard doing so, were ignominiously banished from the court and capital.

After this, the courtiers became alarmed, and tried to correct their habit of speech; but they would have found themselves in constant difficulties, had not one clever person thought of a bright idea. He said that though it was indispensably necessary for a man to have a great nose, women were different; and that a learned man had discovered in a very old manuscript that the celebrated Cleopatra, Queen of Egypt, the beauty of the ancient world, had a turned-up nose. At this information Prince Wish was so delighted that he made the courtier a very handsome present, and immediately sent off ambassadors to ask for Princess Darling in marriage.



She accepted his offer at once and returned with

the ambassadors. He made all haste to meet and welcome her; but when she was only three leagues distant from his capital, before he had time even to kiss her hand, the magician who had once assumed the shape of his mother's cat, Minon, appeared in the air and carried her off before the lover's very eyes.

Prince Wish, almost beside himself with grief, declared that nothing should induce him to return to his throne and kingdom till he found Darling. He would suffer none of his courtiers or attendants to follow him; but, bidding them all adieu, mounted a good horse, laid the reins on the animal's neck, and let him take him wherever he would.

The horse entered a wide, deserted plain, and trotted on steadily the whole day without finding a single house. Master and beast began almost to faint with hunger; and Prince Wish might have wished himself safe at home again, had he not discovered, just at dusk, a cavern, where there sat beside a bright lantern a little woman who might have been more than a hundred years old.

She put on her spectacles the better to look at the stranger, and he noticed that her nose was so small that the spectacles would hardly stay on; then the Prince and the fairy – for it was a fairy – burst into a mutual fit of laughter.

'What a funny nose!' cried the one.

'Not so funny as yours, madam,' returned the other. 'But pray let us leave our noses alone, and be good enough to give me something to eat, for I am dying of hunger, and so is my poor horse.'

With all my heart,' answered the fairy. 'Although your nose is ridiculously long, you are no less the son of one of my best friends. I loved your father like a brother; he had a very handsome nose.'

'What is wanting to my nose?' asked Wish, rather savagely.

'Oh! nothing at all. On the contrary, there is a great deal too much of it; but never mind, one may be a very honest man, and yet have too big a nose. As I said, I was a great friend of your father's; he came to see me. I was very pretty then, and oftentimes he used to say to me, "My sister—".'

'I will hear the rest, madam, with pleasure, when I have supped; but will you condescend to remember that I have tasted nothing all day?'

'Poor boy!' said the fairy, 'I will give you some supper directly; and while you eat it I will tell you my history in six words, for I hate much talking. A long tongue is as insupportable as a long nose; and I remember when I was young how much I used to be admired because I was not a talker; indeed, someone said to the queen, my mother – for poor as you see me now, I am the daughter of a great king, who always—'

'Ate when he was hungry, I hope,' interrupted the Prince, whose patience was fast departing.

'You are right,' said the imperturbable old fairy; 'and I will bring you your supper directly, only I wish first just to say that the king my father—'

'Hang the king your father!' Prince Wish was about to exclaim, but he stopped himself, and only observed that however the pleasure of her

conversation might make him forget his hunger, it could not have the same effect upon his horse, who was really starving.

The fairy, pleased at his civility, called her servants and bade them supply him at once with all he needed. 'And,' added she, 'I must say you are very polite and very good-tempered, in spite of your nose.'

'What has the old woman to do with my nose?' thought the Prince. 'If I were not so very hungry I would soon show her what she is – a regular old gossip and chatter-box. She to fancy she talks little, indeed! One must be very foolish not to know one's own defects. This comes of being born a princess. Flatterers have spoiled her, and persuaded her that she talks little. Little, indeed! I never knew anybody chatter so much.'

While the Prince thus meditated, the servants were laying the table, the fairy asking them a hundred unnecessary questions, simply for the pleasure of hearing herself talk. 'Well,' thought Wish, 'I am delighted that I came hither, if only to learn how wise I have been in never listening to flatterers, who hide from us our faults, or make us believe they are perfections. But they could never deceive me. I know all my own weak points, I trust.' As truly he believed he did.

So he went on eating contentedly, nor stopped till the old fairy began to address him.

'Prince,' said she, 'will you be kind enough to turn a little? Your nose casts such a shadow that I cannot see what is on my plate. And, as I was

saying, your father admired me and always made me welcome at court. What is the court etiquette there now? Do the ladies still go to assemblies, promenades, balls? I beg your pardon for laughing, but how very long your nose is.'

'I wish you would cease to speak of my nose,' said the Prince, becoming annoyed. 'It is what it is, and I do not desire it any shorter.'

'Oh! I see that I have vexed you,' returned the fairy. 'Nevertheless, I am one of your best friends, and so I shall take the liberty of always—' She would doubtless have gone on talking till midnight; but the Prince, unable to bear it any longer, here interrupted her, thanked her for her hospitality, bade her a hasty adieu, and rode away.

He travelled for a long time, half over the world, but he heard no news of Princess Darling. However, in each place he went to, he heard one remarkable fact – the great length of his nose. The little boys in the streets jeered at him, the peasants stared at him, and the more polite ladies and gentlemen whom he met in society used to try in vain to keep from laughing, and to get out of his way as soon as they could. So the poor Prince became gradually quite forlorn and solitary; he thought all the world was mad, but still he never thought of there being anything queer about his own nose.

At last the old fairy, who, though she was a chatter-box, was very good-natured, saw that he was almost breaking his heart. She felt sorry for him, and wished to help him in spite of himself, for she knew the enchantment which hid from him the

Princess Darling could never be broken till he had discovered his own defect. So she went in search of the princess, and being more powerful than the magician, since she was a good fairy and he was an evil magician, she got her away from him, and shut

her up in a palace of crystal, which she placed on the road along which Prince Wish had to pass.

He was riding along, very melancholy, when he saw the palace; and at its entrance was a room, made of the purest glass, in which sat his beloved princess, smiling and beautiful as ever. He leaped from his horse, and ran towards her. She held out her hand

for him to kiss, but he could not get at it for the glass. Transported with eagerness and delight, he dashed his sword through the crystal, and succeeded in breaking a small opening, to which she put up her beautiful rosy mouth. But it was in vain, Prince Wish could not approach it. He twisted his neck about, and turned his head on all sides, till at length, putting up his hand to his face, he discovered the impediment.

'It must be confessed,' exclaimed he, 'that my nose is too long.'

That moment the glass walls all split asunder, and the old fairy appeared, leading Princess Darling.

'Avow, Prince,' said she, 'that you are very much obliged to me, for now the enchantment is ended. You may marry the lady of your choice. But,' added she, smiling, 'I fear I might have talked to you for ever on the subject of your nose, and you would not have believed me in its length, till it became an obstacle to your own desires. Now behold it!' and she held up a crystal mirror. 'Are you satisfied to be no different from other people?'

'Perfectly,' said Prince Wish, who found his nose had shrunk to an ordinary length. And, taking the Princess Darling by the hand, he kissed her, courteously, affectionately, and satisfactorily. Then they departed to their own country, and lived very happily all their days.

Answers to Word Puzzles

Riddle-Me-Ree
The letter 'I'

Decapitation
1. spark
2. glass

Lucky and Unlucky Days

For Marriages

Monday for wealth,
Tuesday for health,
  Wednesday the best day of all;
Thursday for losses,
Friday for crosses,
  Saturday no luck at all.

For Sneezing

Sneeze on Monday, sneeze for danger;
Sneeze on Tuesday, kiss a stranger;
Sneeze on Wednesday, get a letter;
Sneeze on Thursday, something better;
Sneeze on Friday, sneeze for sorrow;
Sneeze on Saturday, see thy love tomorrow.

For Cutting Nails

Cut them on Monday, cut them for health;
Cut them on Tuesday, cut them for wealth;
Cut them on Wednesday, cut them for news;
Cut them on Thursday, a pair of new shoes;
Cut them on Friday, cut them for sorrow;
Cut them on Saturday, a present tomorrow.
But he that on Sunday cuts his horn,
Better that he had never been born.

Murdoch's Rath

There was not a nicer boy in all Ireland than Pat, and clever at his trade too, if only he'd had one.

But from his cradle he learned nothing (small blame to him with no one to teach him!), so when he came to years of discretion, he earned his living by running messages for his neighbours; and Pat could always be trusted to make the best of a bad bargain, and bring back all the change, for he was the soul of honesty and good-nature.

It's no wonder then that he was beloved by everyone, and got as much work as he could do, and if the pay had but fitted the work, he'd have been mighty comfortable; but as it was, what he got wouldn't have kept him in shoe-leather, but for making both ends meet by wearing his shoes in his pocket, except when he was in the town, and obliged to look genteel for the credit of the place he came from.

Well, all was going on as peaceable as could be, till one market-day, when business (or it may have been pleasure) detained him till the heel of the evening, and by nightfall, when he began to make the road short in good earnest, he was so flustered, rehearsing his messages to make sure he'd forgotten nothing, that he never bethought him to leave off his brogues, but tramped on just as if shoe-leather were made to be knocked to bits on the king's highway.

Rath A patch of ground on which the Irish fairies like to dance. It is generally surrounded by a deep, wide ditch in which furze bushes grow.

And this was what he was after saying:

'A dozen hanks of grey yarn for Mistress Murphy.'

'Three gross of bright buttons for the tailor.'

'Half an ounce of throat drops for Father Andrew, and an ounce of snuff for his housekeeper,' and so on.

For these were what he went to the town to fetch, and he was afraid lest one of the lot might have slipped his memory.

Now everybody knows there are two ways home from the town; and that's not meaning the right way and the wrong way, which my grandmother (rest her soul!) said there was to every place but one that it's not genteel to name (there could only be a wrong way there, she said). The two ways home from the town were the high-road, and the way by Murdoch's Rath.

Murdoch's Rath was a pleasant enough spot in the daytime, but not many persons cared to go by it when the sun was down. And in all the years Pat was going backwards and forwards, he never once came home except by the high-road till this unlucky evening, when, just at the place where the two roads part, he got, as one may say, into a sort of confusion.

'Halt!' says he to himself (for his own uncle had been a soldier, and Pat knew the word of command). 'The left-hand turn is the right one,' says he, and he was going down the high-road as straight as he could go, when suddenly he bethought himself. 'And what am I doing?' he says. 'This was my left hand going to town, and how in the name of fortune could it be my left going back, considering that I've turned round? It's well that I looked into it in time.' And with that he went off as fast down the other road as he started down this.

But how far he walked, he never could tell, before all of a sudden the moon shone out as bright as day, and Pat found himself in Murdoch's Rath.

And this was the smallest part of the wonder; for the Rath was full of fairies.

When Pat got in they were dancing round and round till his feet tingled to look at them, being a good dancer himself. And as he sat on the side of the Rath, and snapped his fingers to mark the time, the dancing stopped, and a little man came up, in a black hat and a green coat, with white stockings, and red shoes on his feet.

'Won't you take a turn with us, Pat?' says he, bowing till he nearly touched the ground. And,

indeed, he had not far to go, for he was barely two feet high.

'Don't say it twice, sir,' says Pat. 'It's myself will be proud to foot the floor with ye'; and before you could look round, there was Pat in the circle dancing away for bare life.

At first his feet felt like feathers for lightness, and it seemed as if he could have gone on for ever. But at last he grew tired, and would have liked to stop, but the fairies would not, and so they danced on and on. Pat tried to think of something good to say, that he might free himself from the spell, but all he could think of was:

'A dozen hanks of grey yarn for Mistress Murphy.'

'Three gross of bright buttons for the tailor.'

'Half an ounce of throat drops for Father Andrew, and an ounce of snuff for his housekeeper,' and so on.

And it seemed to Pat that the moon was on one side of the Rath when they began to dance, and on

the other side when they left off; but he could not be sure after all that going round. One thing was plain enough. He danced every bit of leather off the soles of his shoes, and his feet were blistered so that he could hardly stand; but all the little folk did was to stand and hold their sides with laughing at him.

At last the one who spoke before stepped up to him, and – 'Don't break your heart about it, Pat,' says he; 'I'll lend you my own shoes till the morning, for you seem to be a good-natured sort of a boy.'

Well, Pat looked at the fairy man's shoes, that were the size of a baby's, and he looked at his own feet; but not wishing to be rude, 'Thank ye kindly, sir,' says he. 'And if your honour'll be good enough to put them on for me, maybe you won't spoil the shape.' For he thought to himself, 'Small blame to me if the little gentleman can't get them to fit.'

With that he sat down on the side of the Rath, and the fairy man put on the shoes for him, and no sooner did they touch Pat's feet, than they became altogether a convenient size, and fitted him like wax. And, more than that, when he stood up, he didn't feel his blisters at all.

'Bring 'em back to the Rath at sunrise, Pat, my boy,' says the little man.

And as Pat was climbing over the ditch, 'Look round, Pat,' says he. And when Pat looked round, there were jewels and pearls lying at the roots of the furze-bushes on the ditch, as thick as peas.

'Will you help yourself, or take what's given ye, Pat?' says the fairy man.

'Did I ever learn manners?' says Pat. 'Would you have me help myself before company? I'll take what your honour pleases to give me, and be thankful.'

The fairy man picked a lot of yellow furze-blossoms from the bushes, and filled Pat's pockets.

'Keep 'em for love, Pat, me darlin',' says he.

Pat would have liked some of the jewels, but he put the furze-blossoms by for love.

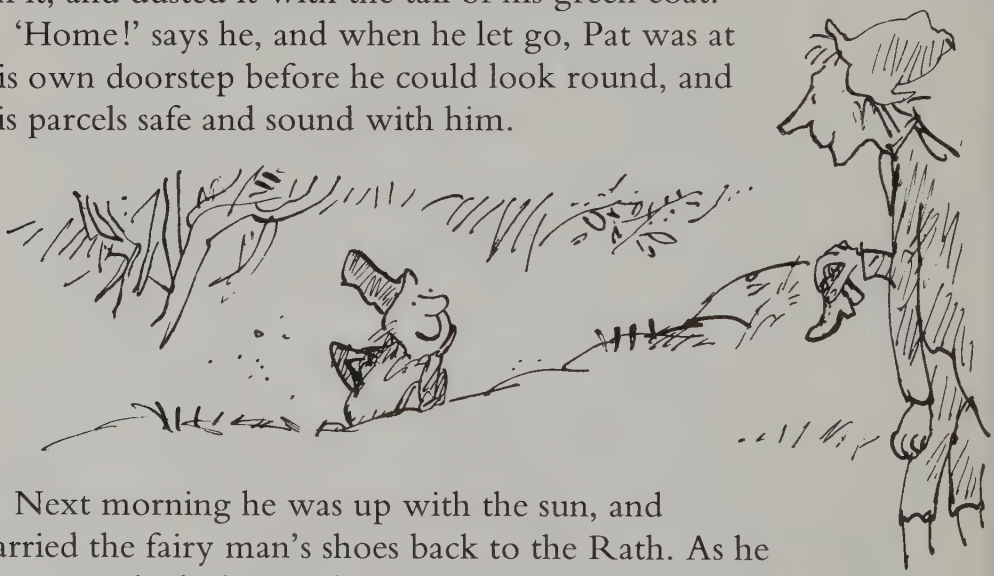
'Good-evening to your honour,' says he.

'And where are you going, Pat, dear?' says the fairy man.

'I'm going home,' says Pat. And if the fairy man didn't know where that was, small blame to him.

'Just let me dust them shoes for ye, Pat,' says the fairy man. And as Pat lifted up each foot he breathed on it, and dusted it with the tail of his green coat.

'Home!' says he, and when he let go, Pat was at his own doorstep before he could look round, and his parcels safe and sound with him.



Next morning he was up with the sun, and carried the fairy man's shoes back to the Rath. As he came up, the little man looked over the ditch.

'The top of the morning to your honour,' says Pat; 'here's your shoes.'

'You're an honest boy, Pat,' says the little gentleman. 'It's inconvenienced I am without them, for I have but the one pair. Have you looked at the yellow flowers this morning?' he says.

'I have not, sir,' says Pat; 'I'd be loth to deceive you. I came off as soon as I was up.'

'Be sure to look when you get back, Pat,' says the fairy man, 'and good luck to ye.'

With which he disappeared, and Pat went home. He looked for the furze-blossoms, as the fairy man told him, and there's not a word of truth in this tale if they weren't all pure gold pieces.

Well, now Pat was so rich, he went to the shoemaker to order another pair of brogues, and being a kindly, gossiping boy, the shoemaker soon learned the whole story of the fairy man and the Rath. And this so stirred up the shoemaker's greed that he resolved to go the very next night himself, to see if he could not dance with the fairies, and have like luck.

He found his way to the Rath all correct, and sure enough the fairies were dancing, and they asked him to join. He danced the soles off his brogues, as Pat did, and the fairy man lent him his shoes, and sent him home in a twinkling.

As he was going over the ditch, he looked round and saw the roots of the furze-bushes glowing with precious stones as if they had been glow-worms.

'Will you help yourself, or take what's given ye?' said the fairy man.

'I'll help myself, if you please,' said the shoemaker, for he thought – 'If I can't get more than Pat brought home, my fingers must all be thumbs.'

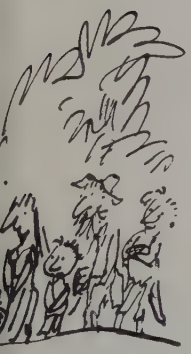
So he drove his hand into the bushes, and if he didn't get plenty, it wasn't for want of grasping.

When he got up in the morning, he went straight to the jewels. But not a stone of the lot was more precious than roadside pebbles. 'I ought not to look till I come from the Rath,' said he. 'It's best to do like Pat all through.'

But he made up his mind not to return the fairy man's shoes.

'Who knows the virtue that's in them?' he said.

So he made a small pair of red leather shoes, as like them as could be, and he blacked the others upon his feet, that the fairies might not know them, and at sunrise he went to the Rath.



The fairy man was looking over the ditch as before.

'Good-morning to you,' said he.

'The top of the morning to you, sir,' said the shoemaker; 'here's your shoes.' And he handed him the pair that he had made, with a face as grave as a judge.

The fairy man looked at them, but he said nothing, though he did not put them on.

'Have you looked at the things you got last night?' says he.

'I'll not deceive you, sir,' says the shoemaker. 'I came off as soon as I was up. Not a peep did I take at them.'

'Be sure to look when you get back,' says the fairy man. And just as the cobbler was getting over the ditch to go home, he says:

'If my eyes don't deceive me, there's the least taste in life of dirt on your left shoe. Let me dust it with the tail of my coat.'

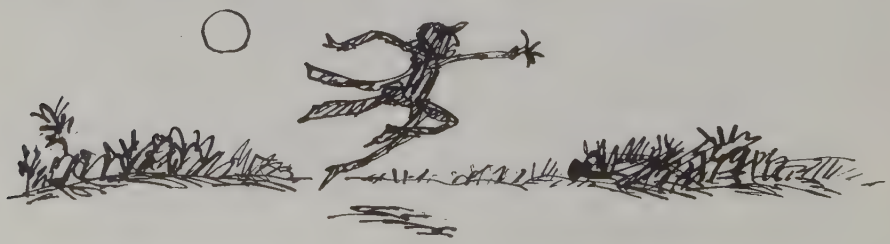
'That means home in a twinkling,' thought the shoemaker, and he held up his foot.

The fairy man dusted it, and muttered something the shoemaker did not hear. Then, 'Sure,' says he, 'it's the dirty pastures that you've come through, for the other shoe's as bad.'

So the shoemaker held up his right foot, and the fairy man rubbed that with the tail of his green coat.

When all was done the shoemaker's feet seemed to tingle, and then to itch, and then to smart, and then to burn. And at last he began to dance, and he danced all round the Rath (the fairy man laughing and holding his sides), and then round and round again. And he danced till he cried out with weariness, and tried to shake the shoes off. But they stuck fast, and the fairies drove him over the ditch, and through the prickly furze-bushes, and he danced away. Where he danced to, I cannot tell you. Whether he ever got rid of the fairy shoes, I do not know. The jewels never were more than wayside pebbles, and they were swept out when his cabin was cleaned, which was not too soon, you may be sure.

All this happened long ago; but there are those who say that the shoemaker dances still, between sunset and sunrise, round Murdoch's Rath.



The Little Witch of the Plain

1 There was once a very cross old witch, who lived on the edge of the green plain.

2 She had a charming, beautiful daughter called Blarnie, who sang songs all day, and at night . . .

3 . . . she learnt magic tricks. For instance, when a tyrant king came to ask her mother to bewitch his secretary . . .

4 . . . Blarnie turned him into a mouse, and the secretary into a cat; he never bullied the poor man again!

5 Sometimes, she was so mischievous that people preferred to risk being enchanted by the old witch . . .

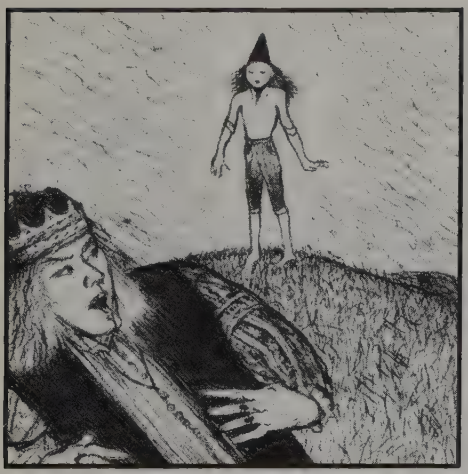
6 . . . who sat indoors, eternally muttering amongst the green smoke, never noticing the daylight at all.

7 Many young men wanted to marry the little witch-girl, but she always refused them . . .

8 . . . saying, 'I'll marry a prince!' But when princes came to woo her she said, 'Only a king for me!'

9 One day a magnificent horseman, wearing a gold crown and princely dress, rode up and saluted her.

10 'I suppose you are the Little Witch of the Plain?' he asked. 'I am,' said Blarnie.



11 'And I can turn you into a black cat!' 'But you'd be sorry,' he said, laughing.

12 'Why?' she asked. 'Because you are a girl as well as a witch,' said he.

13 Then he rode away. And for the first time ever, Blarnie didn't wait to watch the setting sun.

14 'I wish I'd turned him into a black cat while I had the chance,' she sighed.

15 The following day at the same time she saw a small speck in the distance, which came nearer and nearer.

16 It was the stranger on horseback. 'Good day to you,' he said as he approached.

17 'Oh, it's you again.' Blarnie was ungracious. 'I've come to watch you get angry,' he said, dismounting.

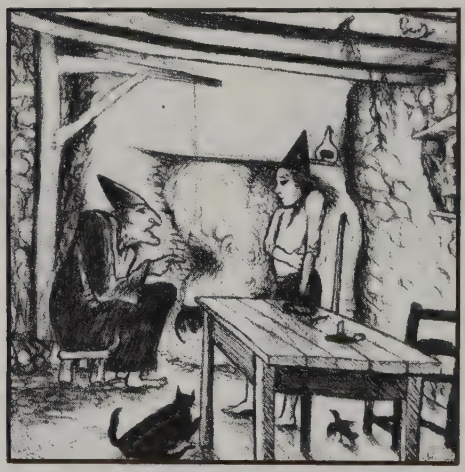
18 'Are you a king?' she asked indifferently. 'Certainly not,' he laughed. 'I kill kings.'

19 She started. 'Only wicked ones,' he assured her. 'Anyway, you give people asses' ears and—'

20 'Well, I won't marry you,' Blarnie interrupted, 'if you're not a king!'

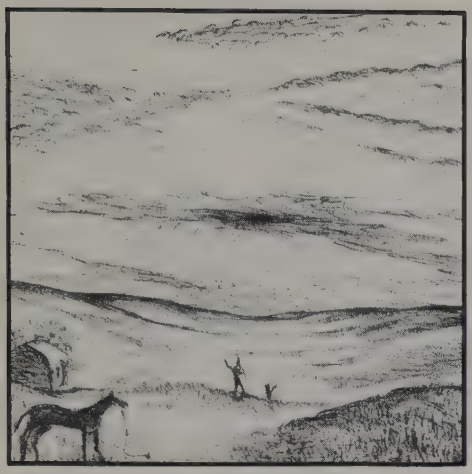
21 'Oh, yes, you will,' he insisted. This was too much! Blarnie changed him into a cat.

22 What a disaster! As spell after spell failed to bring him back, Blarnie's despair grew.



23 'To reverse the spell,' the old witch explained, 'you must give him the most precious thing on Earth . . .

24 . . . but no one may say what that is.' 'Then I'll have to go and look for it!' Blarnie decided.



25 'And the cat must come too!' At dawn they began the journey, walking through the mist, over the wide, green plain . . .

26 . . . following the sun across the sky until they came to a solitary cherry tree.

27 'Cherry tree, can you tell us the way to the most precious thing on Earth?'

28 'Well,' tinkled the cherries, 'The Goblin King of the Red Mountain owns a priceless Diamond Crown!'

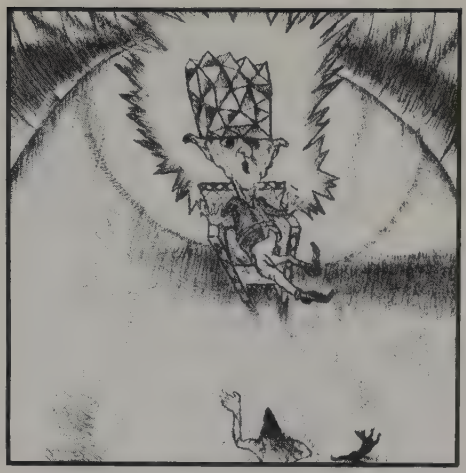
29 They reached the Red Mountain as dusk fell, and Blarnie tapped its granite side seven times.

30 A surprised goblin jumped out. 'Please inform His Majesty that I've come to dance!' requested Blarnie.

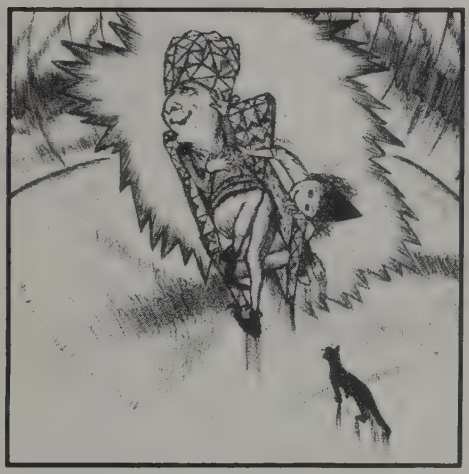
31 'No!' 'Then I will!' she retorted, clapping her hands and skipping past the goblin.

32 Down a long tunnel she ran until a hideous dragon burst out ahead and threatened to eat her.

33 'Go to sleep for a hundred years!' Blarnie shouted. The great form sank, snoring noisily.



34 They entered a golden cave. 'Cat! Look!' The king's throne was silver, his crown a single diamond.



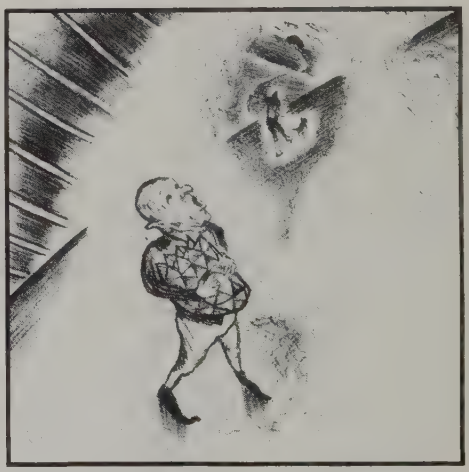
35 Blarnie tiptoed nearer. 'Go away! I'm thinking!' the king grumbled. 'About what?' she asked politely. 'Nothing.'

36 'Then come and dance!' She whisked him from his throne and whirled him round . . .

37 . . . and round. 'Stop!' he panted. 'Help!' he gasped. 'Is that crown too heavy?' Blarnie enquired . . .

38 . . . and placed it triumphantly on the cat's head! Sadly, the cat remained a cat.

39 'All that trouble for nothing!' cried Blarnie. 'Here, Goblin, take your diamond. I want something really precious!'



40 She circled the throne three times, sneezed once, and they were off, following the sun again.

41 At sunset, they met two wood pigeons. 'What's the most precious thing on Earth?' Blarnie asked.

42 'You must learn for yourself,' they cooed. 'But, well, you see that little path?'

43 'It might lead you to a sad prince. Help him, then . . . wait . . .' 'Thank you, good night,' waved Blarnie.

44 'Pigeons must be the silliest creatures I've met,' she thought, as the little path disappeared . . .

45 . . . into a thick, dark wood. 'I can't protect you there, cat,' she said. 'I'll need all my magic for myself, so you had better wait here.'

46 Casting spell after spell, she beat a path through the vicious brambles.

47 Suddenly, a tall, dismal castle loomed up ahead. A young prince was battering the locked iron gates.

48 'My princess!' he sobbed. 'The wicked giant has locked her in his dungeon!' He banged the gates again.

49 'I'm the Little Witch of the Plain,' said Blarnie, 'and I've been sent especially to help you.'

50 Walking up to the gates, she shouted for the Warder. Up came a seven-headed dwarf. Sneezing.

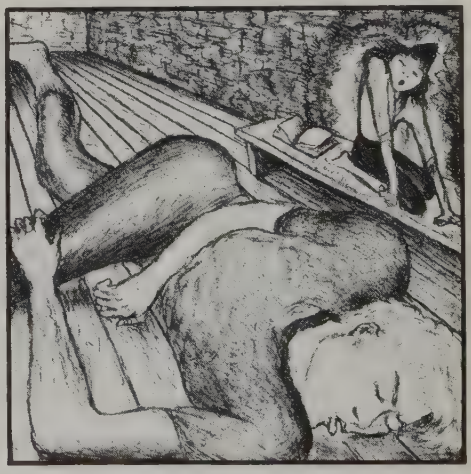
51 And sneezing! And sneezing!! 'Stop sneezing now,' she ordered, taking his keys, 'and go to sleep instantly!'

52 Inside the great castle, she thought she'd have some fun. She knocked on the giant's door . . .

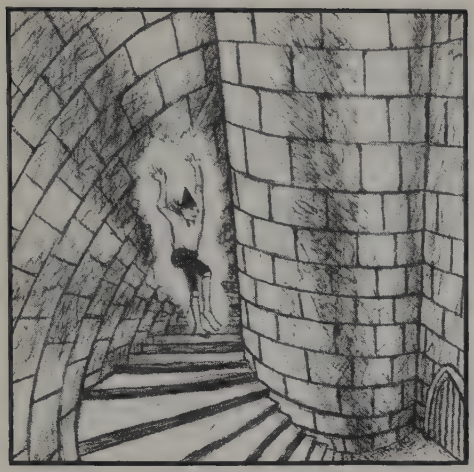
53 'Good day, handsome giant!' she said. 'Who on Earth are you?' the giant roared. 'Who let you in?'

54 'Never you mind!' Blarnie retorted. 'Fancy keeping a beautiful princess locked up in your dungeon!'

55 'Why not? I can do whatever I like! I'll put you into a hundred-year trance!'



56 'Where's that spell book?' he growled. 'Don't bother,' smiled Blarnie, and put him into a hundred-year trance!



57 Then away she went, singing, to the dungeon. She blew on the door until it opened.

58 There sat the princess, darning enormous socks. 'Come, dear Princess, your Prince is waiting outside!'

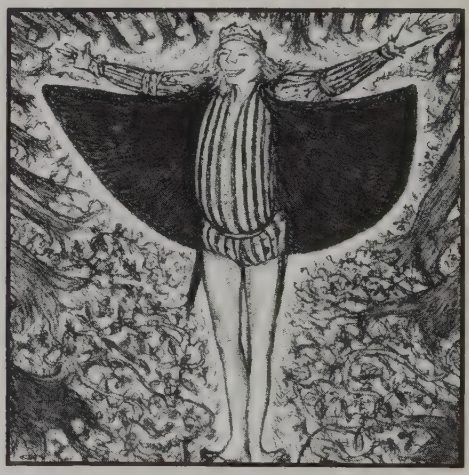
59 'Princess!' cried the prince. 'You're safe! Whatever can I give you to express my joy?'

60 'Give me the most precious thing on Earth – ' whispered the princess, ' – a kiss!'

61 And no one knows what the happy lovers did then – they may still be in the forest . . .

62 Blarnie left them, and found the cat, bravely struggling towards her through the brambles.

63 'Dear cat!' Blarnie knelt down. 'I've found the most precious thing on Earth!' and she kissed him.



64 Immediately, the stately horseman reappeared!

65 But alas! When Blarnie cast a spell to clear the tangled path, nothing happened.

66 'It's my turn now,' said the gallant horseman. 'I'll get us out of this wood.'

67 His sword hacked fiercely at the undergrowth and, at last, there was the cottage. But no witch!

68 She had blown away one night, the people told them, in a puff of green smoke.

69 'Now, you must tell me who you really are!' said Blarnie, when they had got settled.

70 'I am a king, 'he admitted, 'but without a kingdom. When I said I was going to marry you, my people drove me away. So now I can help you.'

71 'And I am a witch without magic,' said Blarnie, 'since I gave you that kiss in the wood. So I must work to help the people.'

72 So Blarnie gives practical advice and harmless charms. She is still the beautiful Little Witch of the Plain, and she has married a king, as she always said she would.

Victorian Tales

Blarnie, the little witch of the plain, can turn a handsome stranger into a cat, but can't turn him back again! A young prince tries to give a beautiful princess a kiss, but his enormous nose gets in the way! A packet of needles saves six little girls from the cooking pot! Magic spells and witches, fairies and ogres, handsome princes and beautiful princesses – they all appear in this collection of tales, puzzles and rhymes which were written about a hundred years ago, when Victoria was Queen. Reading aloud, telling riddles or playing party games were favourite pastimes for adults and children, and the fairy tale was especially popular at this time.

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